FURY OVER AXING OF BUS ROUTE SERVICE

By Liam Timmins

Public-transport provider Aircoach have recently announced they will be discontinuing their service from Galway to Dublin, inspiring outcry from local Councillors and representatives who believe there are inadequate bus facilities offered for Ballinasloe.

Launched in July 2021, the 706X service operated ten times each day of the year (aside from Christmas) between the two city centres. Along its journey, the bus stopped in Maynooth, Athlone and Ballinasloe.

Aircoach announced its shutdown of the route from April 8th, citing it being no longer commercially viable. Refunds and alternative arrangements are now being offered by the providers for those who booked trips passed the termination date.

"It's really sad to see a service being lost, especially a service going directly to Dublin airport" expressed the Galway Leas Cathaoirleach, "I'll tell you one thing, we're lucky to have Citylink."

This shutdown has left Ballinasloe commuters with few options to travel between the cities. Aircoach previously replaced Bus Eireann's 20/20X service as the route's primary provider. Despite protests from local figures at the time, the 20/20X connection was not reinstated.

This route ignored Craughwell, Loughrea and Aughrim and left Ballinasloe with less frequent services. Now without either option, Citylink remains as the only bus operating between Dublin and Galway.

Many local representatives have been critical of the latest decision, noting that commerciality is not an appropriate reason for cancelling a public service. Cathaoirleach of Ballinasloe Municipal Council, Cllr Declan Geraghty, noted that some rural communities are now left "marooned and stranded" without these connections.

"News is that it is going to cease its operations on that route from April 8, which doesn't leave a lot of time for people to find alternative modes of transport or routes. And I think it's unconsidered, it's leaving people in an awful situation at the moment."

Cllr Evelyn Parsons has previously noted the hypocrisy of the government's insistence to transition to public transports for lower emissions, but not taking steps towards regeneration in rural communities and only limiting their travel options.

She believes some commuters will now be forced to use taxis which, as well as being quite expensive, will only increase our carbon footprint. She also observed that some third-level students forced to travel for college are now being hit with a failed transport strategy on top of failed housing policy.

Cllr Parsons has since organised a meeting with the National Transport Agency this May to review this affair and petition for a proper multi-stop service for these rural towns. "There is more to Ireland than Dublin, the west also needs service" Parsons insists.

There have been calls to have the service designated as a Public Service Obligation or PSO route, which would provide a subsidy to an operator to run this route.

An Online Campaign is underway on UPLIFT, to have the Minister re instate the service.

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